

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8803

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THE FOLLOWING TELEGRAM WAS SENT ACTION NEW DELHI
INFO BOMBAY/MADRAS 19 MAY 75 REPEATED FOR YOUR INFO.

QUOTE:

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE CALCUTTA 1080

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SWEL, EGAR, ECON, PINT, IN

SUBJ: REPORT ON HUNGER IN EASTERN INDIA

REF: STATE 113884

1. THERE ARE PROFOUND, ENDEMIC STRUCTURAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS
IN EASTERN INDIA WHICH RADICALLY AFFECT THE QUALITY OF LIFE
ENJOYED/PURSUED BY A MAJORITY OF THE ROUGHLY 155 MILLION PEOPLE
HERE. THERE ARE LOK SABHA AND PROBABLY STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS
COMING UP WITHIN THE NEXT NINE MONTHS. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN AN
UNUSUAL ALTHOUGH NOT UNPRECEDENTED LACK OF RAIN UNTIL THIS WEEK
IN ALL STATES IN EASTERN INDIA. THE COMBINATION OF THESE THREE
PFNS

Y LIFE HAS RESULTED IN SOMEWHAT EXAGGERATED PUBLIC STATE-
MENTS BY OFFICIAL SPOKESMEN FOR THE STATE GOVERNMENTS OF WEST
BENGAL AND ORISSA. WE ASSUME THAT WEINRAUB HAS PICKED THESE
PUBLIC STATEMENTS UP, AS PLAYED IN THE DELHI PRESS, AND TREATED
THEM SERIOUSLY, AS STATEMENTS OF FACT.

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2. WE WOULD NOT FOR AN INSTANT WANT TO MINIMIZE THE HUMAN PROBLEMS

INVOLVED IN A PART OF THE COUNTRY WHERE, AS A GENERAL PROPOSITION, IT SEEMS TRUE THAT THE MALTHUSIAN DILEMMA HAS BECOME THE DOMINANT SOCIO-ECONOMIC THEME. DURING THE PAST THREE YEARS, AT LEAST, IT HAS BEEN THE ODD, OCCASIONAL MONTH WHEN THERE WERE NOT SERIOUS DISEQUILIBRIUMS IN HUMAN TERMS; EXAGGERATED SEASONAL UNEMPLOYMENT, MALNUTRITION--EVEN STARVATION, HIGH PRICES, LOW PURCHASING POWER, AND IN ADDITION DROUGHT AND FLOODS. NEVERTHELESS IT IS ALSO THE CASE THAT WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW (RICE PRICES GENERALLY OVER THE RS.3 PER KILO LEVEL; LITTLE EMPLOYMENT FOR LANDLESS LABORERS; HARDSHIP DUE TO MALNUTRITION) WAS ENTIRELY PREDICTABLE (EVENT WE DID SO, SEE CALCUTTA 486 AND 015) AND IS ADDITIONALLY POLITICALLY CONVENIENT.

3. WE DON'T THINK WE WOULD BE OVERLY CYNICAL TO SUGGEST THAT THE MAIN PINCH, IN POLITICAL TERMS, WHICH IS RESULTING IN THE SCREECHES FROM THE STATE MINISTRIES IS THE ANTICIPATION OF CAMPAIGN EXPENSES AND NECESSARY RELIEF/REHABILITATION/PATRONAGE FLOWS IN ADVANCE OF THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS.

4. DECISIONS HAVE BEEN TAKEN, STEP BY STEP, BY THE STATE GOVERNMENTS IN EASTERN INDIA IN REGARD TO PROCUREMENT (OR LACK THEREOF) WHICH COULD ONLY HAVE HAD A SHARPLY ADVERSE EFFECT ON THE LIFE SITUATIONS OF THE LANDLESS POOR. LEST THIS BE UNDERSTOOD TO BE AN ESSENTIALLY UNIMPORTANT NUMBER OF HUMAN BEINGS OR FRACTION OF THE TOTAL SOCIAL WORLD IN EASTERN INDIA, PLEASE SEE CALCUTTA 884--WEST BENGAL AGRICULTURAL LABORERS. IT IS ROUGHLY ONE-FOURTH OF THE 12 MILLION WORKING POPULATION IN THE STATE.

5. DROUGHT CONDITIONS TODAY EXIST IN ORISSA (WHICH, BECAUSE IT IS A CONTINUATION OF LAST YEAR'S MONSOON FAILURE IN WESTERN ORISSA, IS MOST LONG-TERM AND SERIOUS), PARTS OF WEST BENGAL, AND PARTS OF BIHAR, AND TRIPURA. THERE HAS BEEN RAIN IN ASSAM. THE LACK OF RAIN IS DAMAGING PROSPECTS FOR THE BORO CROP (WHICH IS THE MINOR ONE OF THE YEAR, DECREASING DAY-LABOR JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR THOSE DEPENDENT ON SUCH EMPLOYMENT (THE AGRICULTURAL LABORERS) AND, IN ANTICIPATION OF EVEN GREATER PROBLEMS LATER, SENDING OPEN-MARKET RICE PRICE UP. IN ADDITION, THE MODIFIED RATIONING SYSTEM WHICH SERVES (NOTIONALLY AT LEAST) THE RURAL AREAS IS, EXCEPT ON THE ODD CASE, NON-FUNCTIONING IT IS DEPENDENT ON SUPPLIES FROM THE STATE GOVERNMENTS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RESULTING FROM THEIR PROCUREMENT PROGRAMS. SUCH PROGRAMS, HAVING BEEN ALLOWED--WE ARE CHOOSING OUR WORDS CAREFULLY HERE--TO COLLAPSE BY THE STATE GOVERNMENTS (SEE CALCUTTA 486 AND 015) ARE OBVIOUSLY UNABLE TO SUPPLY THE SYSTEM DURING TIMES OF SCARCITY.

6. SO WEINRAUB, WE WOULD SAY, HAS TAKEN THE EXAGGERATED STATEMENTS OF OSTENSIBLY RESPONSIBLE MINISTERS SERIOUSLY. HE HAS HIMSELF WILDLY EXAGGERATED THE PRICE OF RICE. HE IS CORRECT IN

POINTING OUT THE POLITICAL DECISIONS LEADING TO NON-PROCUREMENT;
HE IS RIGHT ABOUT THE INFLUENCE OF THE BIG FARMERS ON CONGRESS
PARTY PROGRAMS. AND HE IS GENERALLY RIGHT ABOUT THE PLIGHT OF
THE POOR. WHERE HE MISLEADS IS IN THE INFERENCE THAT THIS IS AN
UNEXPECTED SITUATION AND THAT, GIVEN CURRENT LEVELS OF
AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY IN EASTERN INDIA, IT COULD BE ANYTHING
BUT RECURRING. IT IS WORSE WHEN THERE IS NO RAIN BUT IT IS
A BASIC FACT OF LIFE AT ALL TIMES.
ROSSELOT

UNQUOTE.
SCHNEIDER

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